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COMPLAINT BY C.I.A. OVER REPORT ON TV

Agency Protests to F.C.C. as ABC News Admits Inability to Confirm Murder Plot

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 21 — The Central Intelligence Agency complained to the Federal Communications Commission today about an ABC News report, broadcast in September, alleging that the agency planned to assassinate a Honolulu man.

The agency said its complaint "alleges that ABC deliberately distorted the news and violated the fairness doctrine" by "falsely and without foundation charging that the C.I.A. had conspired to assassinate U.S. citizens and had committed unauthorized and illegal acts."

ABC News admitted this evening that its report "cannot be corroborated, and we have no reason to doubt the C.I.A.'s denial" that it conspired in such an assassination plan.

The Federal Communications Commission regulates the broadcast industry and issues operating licenses for individual radio and television stations. But it is unclear what action, if any, it could take against ABC News.

Thomas Goodman, a spokesman for ABC News, said today it would have no comment on the complaint to the communications agency "until we have a chance to review the complaint."

But on this evening's "World News Tonight" program, the anchor, Peter Jennings, read what he called "an update and clarification" saying the agency "strongly denies one aspect of our report," that it had planned an assassination.

Story Involved Honolulu Man

The report appeared on ABC News's "World News Tonight" Sept. 19 and 20. It said the intelligence agency planned to assassinate Ronald Rewald, a Honolulu investment counselor whose company had provided cover for several sensitive and potentially embarrassing agency operations. Mr. Rewald's concern is now defunct, and he is charged with 100 counts of fraud, perjury and tax evasion for allegedly defrauding hundreds of investors.

Mr. Rewald has asserted that he was a covert agent, and ABC News said it had evidence to support that assertion. The report also included an interview with a man named Scott Barnes, who said the agency asked him "to take him out, you know, to kill" Mr. Rewald. Mr. Barnes told ABC News that Mr. Rewald "obviously knew some things in regards to national security, and he was no longer an asset — he was now a liability."

On Sept. 26 the agency demanded a retraction. It was an unusual move for the agency, which seldom offers any comment on news reports about its activities. "The allegations are totally false and are insulting not only to the C.I.A. but to the U.S. system of justice that has been examining the case," the agency said then.

Allegations Were Not Confirmed

In the statement aired this evening, Mr. Jennings said ABC News had tried and failed to corroborate Mr. Barnes' allegations after the agency protested the original report. Mr. Jennings said that ABC News then asked Mr. Barnes to take a polygraph test, and he refused. At that point, Mr. Jennings said, ABC News notified the intelligence agency that it planned to broadcast tonight's clarification.

The agency's statement today said the complaint was filed "only after careful consideration and several requests to have ABC correct its errors." The statement said the agency was not satisfied with the statement aired on today's "World News Tonight" program.

The network "accepts the C.I.A.'s denial of one of the charges, of attempted assassination," the agency statement said, "but has refused to address any other aspect of the broadcast."

The agency's statement also said the agency "has requested that the F.C.C. conduct an appropriate inquiry, make findings on the issue and determine what corrective action should be taken by ABC."

The agency's statement today said that its complaint "alleges that ABC only presented evidence supporting its predetermined position that C.I.A. was at fault and ignored contrary evidence."

Jack Anderson, the syndicated columnist, has also written about the Rewald case in recent weeks, and an agency spokesman said, "We will deal with that problem separately."

In its Sept. 26 statement, the agency said, "As ABC knows, the C.I.A., along with the rest of the U.S. Government, is prohibited by law from participating in assassination."